



# SCHOOL BUS, INC.

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## **DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION "POINT OF CONTACT"** **JANUARY 2008 NEWSLETTER**

### **Emergency Preparedness**

As winter continues it seems only natural to continue to think about emergency planning. Do your drivers know what to do in the event of early dismissals, inclement weather or other emergency situations? In addition, we all know that emergency planning and preparation goes far beyond the weather. The following is a checklist that will hopefully help you to assess and aid your own emergency planning.

Are your drivers trained in student behavior management and discipline procedures? While some drivers might have a natural ability working with students, many drivers find student management to be the most difficult part of their job. How much should drivers intercede if a fight breaks out between two students? What is the procedure if a weapon is either reported or spotted on the bus?

Have your drivers been trained how to deal with irate parents? What are the procedures if a parent or other unauthorized rider attempts to board the bus? How does your dispatcher deal with complaints? Some situations may end up becoming escalated based on the responses of your employees if they are improperly trained.

Conduct a security assessment of your property and bus yard. Is it properly lit for night? Are employees trained to watch for unauthorized vehicles or persons on the property? Is access restricted for unauthorized persons? Are drivers trained to notice any vehicle tampering that might occur during a field trip?

Are drivers aware of emergency communication procedures for all field trips? What should drivers do if a blizzard, tornado, or other event occurs while they are at another school or in transit?

Do your emergency procedures cover both natural disasters (weather) and acts of crime and violence?

Discuss with local police and or decision-makers what role school buses could provide in a community wide evacuation. It is doubtful that anyone will forget the images of the school bus lots that were not utilized during Hurricane Katrina. If you are part of a community disaster plan have you discussed with staff how would you mobilize the buses, who would be called to drive?

Have your drivers undergone any training with regard to terror-related issues, bomb threat and suspicious devices? What about School Bus Watch training and/or heightened awareness at bus stops and while driving? Training should not be limited to terrorist acts but include child abduction situations as well.

Are school bus drivers trained on interacting with public safety officials aboard buses, at accident scenes, in on-road emergencies, and when emergency situations exist at schools? Are they aware of the protocols for dealing with school evacuations, student release procedures, family custody issues, and associated matters that may arise? Recently, we have seen the media on crash sites before or at the same time as law enforcement. Have drivers been trained on what to do if the TV camera crews show up on site?

Do you have up to date student rosters, emergency contact numbers, first aid kits, and other necessary emergency information and equipment aboard all buses? What about a "crash kit" in your office that someone can grab before going to an accident site?

Have you made school buses available to local law enforcement and other public safety officials for training exercises?

Hold periodic meetings with all levels of staff during the school year to discuss discipline procedures, safety practices, and associated issues.

Consider ID badges or other methods for parents to identify substitute bus drivers as employees prior to putting children on a school bus with an unfamiliar driver.

Practice emergency exercises to evaluate and refine written emergency plans to make sure that what is in writing could actually work in a real emergency. Remember that an emergency exercise is to test the plan only, not to test the people involved.

Prepare students on what to do in an emergency situation. Have them identify all emergency exits. Practice opening a roof hatch or window. Teach how to use the two-way radio to get help if the driver is disabled.

Make sure drivers are trained to be familiar with all buses in the fleet in case their designated vehicle is in the shop for a few days.

Consider developing a "pre-trip briefing" for passengers on charter trips who might not be familiar with emergency exits and emergency procedures.

Are your cell phone numbers and school contact information all up to date? With the revolving door of school administrator's make sure you don't get lost in the shuffle. What school personnel are you supposed to contact if an emergency occurs after school hours?

### **Handrails and Drawstrings** **Clothing Hazards for School Buses**

I know we have not heard much about this subject in the past few years, but I thought it was a good reminder article to help remind us not to let our guard down when it comes to the draw string dangers.

Drawstrings can be and are dangerous. A lot of children's apparel has drawstrings. Do you know the danger with these? Drawstrings can catch on the bus handrails or bus doors. A drawstring at the waist, hood or neck can catch in a small gap on a bus rail or door and as the child is exiting a bus. If the bus door closes catching a drawstring and the child is not seen, the child could get dragged and or run over by the bus. This unfortunately was the case in some of the freak accidents involving school children.

This is not only a problem with buses but also playground equipment. Jackets and sweatshirts with drawstrings should be avoided but other items should be limited as well such as scarves, belt buckles and other loose clothing. The younger the child, the more likely they will be involved in a serious accident as they just do not understand the potential dangers.

The danger of loose fitting clothing has been recognized by school bus manufacturers and school districts where new buses are being outfitted with handrails that won't catch drawstrings but the repair of existing bus rails is slow. There is no re-engineering of bus doors specifically to address the drawstring hazard at this time. Drivers are trained to recognize these hazards but they can't be expected to see them all so it becomes incumbent on the parents to have clothing without drawstrings or remove those (drawstrings) all together.

Some simple tips to make school clothing safer: Choose clothes without drawstrings and use snaps, Velcro or buttons. Remove hood and neck drawstrings from the waist and bottoms of coats. Teach children of the dangers of large buckles, backpack straps that are not secure or any other items that could dangle and get caught.

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